

## COMMUNITY FORMATION THROUGH THE RITUAL PRACTICES: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF YADAVS IN RAJANPURA AND TARAWA VILLAGE OF UTTAR PRADESH\*

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### Abstract

Sanskara (ordination) and Rina (debts) system are inevitable part of the Indian culture. In Hindu Dharma's mythology, there are four types of Rina system; a man is born with a debt which must be paid off before one's death; namely, Dev Rina, Rishi Rina, Pitra Rina and Atithi Rina. Within the Pitra Rina, there are four steps; they are Antyeshti Sanskar, Asthi Visarjan, Shradh and Brahmin Bhoj (feasting to priest). Brahmin Bhoj is now known as 'Biradari Bhoj' or 'Prasad (sacrament) of Lord Jagannath'.

The research paper elaborates how the Biradari Bhoj of Yadav community is not only based on ritual beliefs or religious practices like observing vegetarianism, purification of mythological sins of his family. But it also elaborates how they are intended to show their belongingness to secret lineage and leader's dynasty. The paper examines how community formation is achieved through the process of mythological purification, intra-community Biradarism, Chittha System and Biraha Folklore.

**Key word:** Biradarism, Biradari Bhoj, Chittha System, Given & Consciousness Category.

### Introduction

Traditional rural fairs are major way of interacting and linking among rural communities. Fairs have always been a part of rural India. It fulfills to social, religious, rituals and economic needs of rural community. Even today most of the rural communities have still their occasional fairs. In rural area of Uttar Pradesh, three types of fairs are existing in which first one is native '*Public Fair*'. It is very popular in rural community for fulfilling their socio-economic needs. Its main objectives are 'to organising the socio-economic activity, commemoration, recreation etc. In the public fair, all castes and religion people can participate. Second one is '*Religious Fair*'. Its main aims are 'to bring toleration, interaction, and fulfilling the religious and social desires. Few religious fair, like- *Durga Puja* (goddess worship), *Dashahara*, *Kumbh Mela*<sup>i</sup> etc. can exemplify in this regard. Third one is *caste based fair* which popularly known as '*Biradari Bhoj*' in Hindi speaking belts. It is based on traditionalism part of ancestral ritual worship where some castes

participate together in the name of lord *Jagarnath*. This fair is usually celebrated for two days. On the first day, native villagers and friends participate, in which firstly they offers food, symbolically to Brahmin community and after that serve other caste people and relatives. For the first day program, the organizer invites to participants through the ‘*oral invitation*’ with the help of Praja or *Kamin* (see- Jajmani system) who belongs to Barber or Kahar caste either a family person from the household or all members. It depends on Organizer’s economic capacity. On the second day, specially only own Biradari (community) are invited with the help of *Chaudharies* (head of the caste). This invitation system is called their “*Neuta*” and “*Chitt*.”

*Biradari Bhoj* is celebrated by all castes as a socio-ritual acceptance. It has a highly devoted medium of caste solidarity and consciousness. It is very powerful medium to demonstrate caste solidarity and unity. It has some latent and manifest functions. Manifest functions of this *Bhoj* (commensality) are ‘demonstration of economic and numerical strength, fulfillment of ritual or religious desires, caste solidarity, celebration, interaction and following of vegetarianism etc’. It has also some important latent functions ‘like- getting horizontal mobility within a castes fabric, informal social security, caste based purified identity, knowing own caste network, getting honour’ (within own native society) as well as becoming a *reference man* (within own community).

### **Yadav and their Biradarism**

*Biradari* system is a new emerging rural societal phenomenon in Indian caste system. Popularly, *Biradari* word is used to show equal and without hierarchal form. It is carried out with the idea of showing mutual brotherhood with certain ideological propagation. However, the word *Biradari* was more popularised by some organizations and associational activities like ‘*All India Yadav Mahasabha* (1924) and *All India Pal Mahasabha* (1910) etc. In sum, Biradari system is a designation for a group of people who organised in name of mythical common ancestors and their main aim to convey collective solidarity, to enhance vertical mobility, to develop social capital and also to bring consciousness of their origin. However, the notion of brotherhood among Yadavs can be referred as *Yadav Biradarism* that represents to many cognate castes.

Yadav Biradari mystifies themselves as ‘*Yadu-Vanshi*’ and much more with *Krisna-Vansi Yadav* cult (Babb: 1989), on the basis of *Bhagwat Dharma*’s mythology. In the same way, they identify themselves as cow herder commune with sacred identity segments. For instance, the title *Yadav* represents many castes like Ahir, Gwal, Gop, Golla etc. who are intended toward forming a

community based prideful identity with ambition of ritual upward mobility. In sum, on the one hand, the caste systems are more centralized into exclusion based cultural notions of purity and pollution. On the other hand, the notion of Biradarism shows a new form of identity formation over caste system.

### **The Discourse of Changing Process in Caste System**

After independence, because of fundamental rights and some constitutional provision, significant changes have been taken place over the caste system for example, *Groupisation of caste* (Ghurye: 1930), *Sanskritisation* (M.N. Srinivas, 1952), *Ambedakarisation* (Sau: 2001), Politicisation of caste, *Triabilisation* (Kaliya: 1961 & Chauhan: 1966), *Yadavisation* (Michelutti: 2004) etc. are important studies provoked such changes and caste mobility.

### **Community Formation and Communitisation of Castes in Yadav Community**

Both terms show a new dimension with positive aspect of caste system that is based on the way of *Biradarism* (the procedure of brotherhoods). On the one hand, the term community formation shows its consciousness of societal practices and political based activities like ‘*All India Yadav Mahasabha (AIYM)*’, *Yadav Sammelan* (conference), *Sadar festival* (in Hyderabad) and *Birha Folklore* in Hindi speaking belts. On the other hand, the term ‘*communitisation of castes*’ shows its non-political (like- *Biradari Bhoj*) practices. To some extent, these organizational activities create consciousness for *Yadu mythology* with the notion of cow herder identity. The *Yadu mythology* builds the notion of equality in many sub-castes (like- *Ahir, Gwal, Gop, Ghurpita, Vansiha, Golla* etc.) of Yadav community.

The journey of caste towards community formation can be divided into four steps on the basis of some structural functional changes in caste structures: the first step; “*Groupisation of caste*”<sup>iii</sup> can be identified as political way of mobilisation in which few castes grouped for ambition of political gain during 1923. Second step can be referred as ‘transactional period’ especially the decade of 1950 when *Sanskritisation*<sup>iii</sup>, *De-Sanskritisation*<sup>iv</sup> and *Ambedakarisation* or *Dalitisation* tendency were intended into socio-cultural mobility. Third phase can be seen as ‘conglomeration of castes’ especially the decade of 1980 which is also known as post-Ambedakarist period and it may also acknowledge as initial period of ‘communitisation of castes’. It is very important period when some changes in caste system were occurring with

socio-political interest. The current phase shows the positive way of changing pattern in caste system where many similar castes re-organized in larger framework as an ‘imagined community’ through socio-ritual process. The basic sociometry of this phase is to create a dominant myth which creates the notion of Biradarism throughout some processes of ritual activities.

### **Mythological Purification: In terms of community formation**

Theoretically, caste system is based on symbolic ideology of *Varna System*. In Hindu dharma’s ideology of caste where usually there are such beliefs like- in case of death, new birth and inter-caste marriage etc, people feel impure for some time. For removing such mythological impurity they follow some *Samskara* like- *Niskraman*, *Antesthi* and *Biradari Bhoj*. After completion of these rituals a performer got acceptance by the society.

Whereas, [re]interpretation of traditional myth has been happening at broad level in various communities including Yadavs for showing pseudo superiority of belongingness from sacred lineage or dynasty, and collectively these activities can be termed as ‘mythological purification’. In this regard, the *caste-scopie attitude*<sup>v</sup> is also responsible factor for ‘mythological purification’ because it creates intimidating atmosphere for ‘minority castes’<sup>vi</sup>. That is why minority castes want to form community basis identity. For fulfilling this ambition, they emphasize few myths or tales on the basis of religious texts of Bhagawat Geeta and Mahabharata. Moreover, they also take help from various modern sources such as, internet, magazine, pamphlets, and local texts. Apart from this, Biraha folk-lore and *Biradari Bhoj* in Hindi speaking areas, *Sadar festival* in Hyderabad are also the basic tools for spread their mythological purification in the notion of social acceptance.

### **For Illustration: Gwala Caste**

According to Manusmirti, such people are engaged in milk-selling activities more than one week, suddenly they fall down into Shudra status, even Brahmin too. With certain mythology, Gwala (now they also known as ‘Yadav’) manifests their belongings from Nand-Vanshi with cow herder identity<sup>vii</sup> (Michelutti: 2008). Due to engaging with milk-selling activities, they come under the polluting category (see. Manusmirti: 10). But in present context that (Manusmirti’s) discourse has changed due to ‘mythological purification’. Now Gwala feels it is pure work because lord Krishna (a popular god of Hinduism) was engaged in cattle herder activity. In this regard, AIYM (All India Yadav Mahasabha) write on the site ‘[www.yadav.com](http://www.yadav.com)’, ‘GARWA SE

*KAHO GWALA (Yadav) HAIN*” (Yadav’s are proud to be Gwala). In sum, ‘Mythological Purification’ is socio-ritual phenomena for emphasizing that his/her caste belongs to sacred lineage.

### **The Notion of Biradarism among villagers**

The implication of community formation can be seen on the way of Biradarism which is operated into two ways. First, *Intra-Community Biradarism*, it is a polarize caste group based trend which follows popular mythological traditions and believes. In other words, the notion of *Intra-Community Biradarism* shows positive aspects, such as, ‘hierarchy-less equal social stratum, brotherhood and fraternity’ who connected with the relationship and support between people in the same group of castes beyond partial or one-side devotion in favour of a particular caste like casteism. This mythological belief is carried out by their manifestation of belongingness from a common ancestor which makes them equal stratum like- brothers.

Second, *Inter-Community Biradarism* can be identified in rural area on the basis of principle of ‘village exogamy’. It means that all villagers (both male & female) of the same clan, the same localized clan and the same village are bounded by the morality of brother-sister and, therefore, that both sex and marriage are prohibited between members of any of these units (Hershman 1981:133-134). On the same way, we can also identified that outer shape of village exogamy is reciprocity, morality and brotherhood, but inner-side it is also based on caste intervention and hierarchy or layer basis for maintaining local and socio-cultural dominance (including male based domination).

### **The Inter-Caste Biradarism in Tarwa<sup>viii</sup> Village: An Illustration**

With close observation in Tarwa village, it found inter-caste Biradarism like- mutual dependency (in sense of monetary relation), reciprocity (by Jajmani system), redistribution (by Hoon System)<sup>ix</sup> and exchange (including money, goods and eatable things) etc. has been operated in-between villagers. Such as; Socio Biradarism is operating there with participation in different occasions like marriage ceremony, *Biradari Bhoj*, *Deeh Puja* (worship) and *Mela* (fairs) etc. Political Biradarism is functioning by *Case Panchayat*, *Chittha Custom*, *Chaudharies*, *Mukhiya* and *Panch Parmeshawaram*. Economic Biradarism reveals their consolidated inter-caste & community based relation within Jajmani and Hoon system. We can observe that during natural calamity villagers use to help each-other. This can exemplify in Situational Biradarism. In

Rajanpura, since there is only one majority caste 'Yadav' therefore the question of inter-community participation mostly does not arise. However, it must be noted that in this village intra-community Biradarism is mechanizing in healthy way.

### **Chittha System: A Managerial Body for Biradarism**

Chittha system is a special ceremony for Chaudhari (caste head) where they get-together and discuss some issues for instance inter and intra-caste conflicts, misunderstanding among Biradaris. It is organized before one week the Bhoj. The main aim of this function is to organize Biradari Bhoj in proper way in which Chaudhari takes responsibility for distributing 'Neota' (invitation) to all Biradari Bandhu.

The *Chittha* custom plays vital role to communicate in proper way. It is very powerful medium of reciprocal relationship in order to get caste solidarity because it provides a platform for connecting *Yadav Samaj* with organized way in rural sites.

Through negotiating with villages, it is found that if any person solemnise marry from other caste (Thakur, Kurmi, etc.) rather than within community framework then accused person organizes *Social Biradari Bhoj*<sup>x</sup> in order to be declared purified. After this, they are accorded with social acceptance. It can be observed there local leaders, Mukhiya or Pradhan, Chaudharis and some educated social people are also main participant of Chittha system.

To sum up, the proper managerial system provides healthy subsistence for any consolidate organization. In this regard, we can say that Chittha system is a traditional statutory body, and it is working as medium of 'social and organisational capital' among Yadavs. Chittha system reproduced a close social relation which is responsible for emerging a new pattern of relation (Biradari) in northern parts of India. It is very significant medium to form social relationship with proper managerial adjustment. It also seems stealing freedom in rural setting in orthodoxy manner but not same as Khap Panchayat and Panch Parmeswar.

### **Biraha Folk Lore: Ambitious Consciousness Efforts of Yadav Biradari**

Biraha is the form of classical music which is sung by the Yadavs in their Biradari Bhoj as parts of the tradition. It provides very cohesive dialog by which spectators familiarize about 'Ahir/Yadav Pride Tales' and some symbolic dominant terminologies. Few intellects engage in this folklore as a singer and writer. It is important medium of recreation in the Biradari Bhoj. It has also some latent and manifest functions. Few manifest functions: in views, to create awareness of dynasty; to explain some dominant terminology; to recreate *Bhai-Chara*

(Brotherhoods); to provide some new information about politics and organizational activities of Yadav community. The latent function of Biraha folklore can be understood in following way: to create an atmosphere for accepting to symbolic dominant terminology; to make a 'pride-full identity'; to manage community based unity as well as to develop notion of Biradarism. According to native's views, 'years ago people (upper castes) used derogatory terms for Yadavs like Gwale, Gwalin and Ahira. Meanwhile, after introducing a new term 'Yadav' with helps of 'Yadu mythology' now their old identity has been changed, and they are addressed in the name of Yadav or Yadav-Ji with respect in the study area.

### **Conclusion** conciseness for *Intra-community Biradarism* through

After webbing the whole argument here concerning point is that Yadav Samaj consciously follows some ritual activities (like, Biradari Bhoj) and they intend into community engineering process with ambition of ritual as well as political mobility. The mechanism of socio-ritual process implements with the idea of *Mythological Purification, Biradari Bhoj* and *Biraha Folk Lore, Chittha system* by which they redefine their 'paste' (in terms of '*GARW SE KAHO GAWALA HAIN*') as well as manifestation of the present (in terms of '*AHIR GAURAV GATHA*') that enhance to form a pan identity.

### **The Role of 'Given' and 'Conscious' category in community formation**

*Consciousness category* represents to those people who play significant and dominant role in Village Panchayat, Caste Panchayat, local politics (village level to provincial levels) etc. Apart from this, the term '*Consciousness Category*' also indicates to government employee and businessman who play major role in community engineering process. In case of Biradari Bhoj, Chittha system and Biraha folk lore, the organizers of Biradari Bhoj, *Chaudharies*, writers, singers and some educated participants can be identified as 'Consciousness Category' among Yadavs. *Consciousness Category* provides an intellectual platform and basic framework for bigger identity formation.

The terms '*Given Category*' is opposite word of 'Conciseness Category'. This category represent to those people within Yadav community who are unable to get government opportunity (like, job, contract, advantage etc.) as well as those who are educationally, socially and economically backward. Apart from this, those people are not aware about their local societal environment and social capital can be included in 'Given Category'. Regarding the study area, most of the Yadav family can be included under the conscious category partly because of participation in political

activities, such as, All India Yadav Mahasabha, Samajwadi Parti and village level to provincial level elections.

## NOTES

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\*Devi Prasad is research scholar and he is still working on caste politics.

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<sup>i</sup> Prayag (Sangam) is now known as Allahabad which is situated in Uttar Pradesh where every year more than ten million pilgrims are participating in Kumbh Mela.

<sup>ii</sup> The term first used by Ghurye in his book 'caste and race in India, 1932.

<sup>iii</sup> The term has defined by MN. Sriniva in 'Social Change in Modern India', 1966.

<sup>iv</sup> See- Advance Encyclopedia of Sociology, Rawat Publication, 2007, pp. 102.

<sup>v</sup> The stereotypical examine pattern which often based on 'caste' can be referred as caste-scopie attitude.

<sup>vi</sup> Minority caste means here those who have no numerical strength (few minority castes like- Ahir, Gwal, Gop, Goala and Hridwar etc).

<sup>vii</sup> Gwalas were also divided into three sub-castes: Bharotias, Jijhotias, and Kaoras (Kamarias).

<sup>viii</sup> Rajanpura and Tarwa villages were my study of area during my M. Phil program (2012-13).

<sup>ix</sup> It is kind of labour exchange among backward castes.

<sup>x</sup> Social Biradari Bhoj is organized only in the case of inter-caste marriage.

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